



Your Turn
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Guest columnist

Transform “the jangling discords of our nation”

On Aug. 28, 1963, the Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr. stood on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, DC, to say, “I have a dream that one day this nation will rise up, live out the true meaning of its creed...With this faith we will be able to transform the jangling discords of our nation into a beautiful symphony of brotherhood.”

On Aug. 28, 2013, seven women who believed that the ugly discords of politics can be changed through the agency of women incorporated the Institute for Women in Politics of Northwest Florida as a non-profit organization in the state of Florida.

The founding of our Institute on the 50th anniversary of King’s historic speech is a coincidence, one that we were not aware of at the time, but it is a connection that we cherish. As we work to achieve a greater presence of women in the seats of public power, we do so knowing, from local experience and national events, that a sufficient number of capable women of good character and independent mind serving on a legislative body can tame discord and make politics honorable.

It is not an easy mission that we have set for ourselves. The Institute is non-partisan, but its directors and members are individually partisan, many actively so. It does not engage in examination or advocacy of issues. When we come together as members of the Institute, we put our personal politics aside so that we may focus on what brings us together: advancing women who are interested in civic and political leadership regardless of their party affiliation or ideology.

It is, too, an exciting mission as we recount the successes of the year just passed and anticipate those of the election year before us.

Our membership has grown from seven in 2013 to 74 today. It includes 13 elected or appointed public officials and five former officeholders; five candidates pre-filed for 2018 and two former candidates; seven members who work in government, including two legislative aides; educators, business executives and professionals, non-profit executives and professionals, entrepreneurs, attorneys, retired service members, a physician—and two gentlemen.

In 2017 the Institute organized and hosted ten networking and education events for members. Many were also available to guests of members, and one was open to the public.

Our “Key Connections” events provide members and their guests an opportunity to connect with each other as well as an information component. Last year members heard: “Upping Your Game through Leadership Florida and Connect Florida” (January), “Post-Election Insights from 2016 Women Candidates” (February), “Democrat or Republican, Party Support Is Key to a Seat in Tallahassee” (March), “Meet the Trailblazers — Women in Office in Escambia, Santa Rosa, and Okaloosa, Present and Past” (August), and “Backstage Pass — Insights from Northwest Florida’s Legislative Aides” (October).

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